

The Triumphal Entry

Jesus had arrived at Bethany on Friday. The dinner, the anointing, and the gathering of the crowd took place after His arrival, with the Sabbath (Friday dusk to Saturday dusk) intervening. On the next day (Palm Sunday), the ever-growing crowd that had arrived in Jerusalem for the festival learned that Jesus was on His way there. They cut palm branches and went out to meet Him. They received Him as a king, as the Jewish leaders feared they might. They hailed Him with words from Psalm 118:25-26, "Hosanna!" ("Save, I pray!") "Blessed is He who is coming in the name of the Lord!" This psalm was from the Hallel (Psalms 113–118), sung as part of the Passover feast. Jews sang it when the Passover lambs were sacrificed, and now they sang it for the Lamb of God on His way to be their sacrifice. But they weren't thinking of sacrifice. They received Jesus as heavenly royalty, Israel's King.

It happened spontaneously, but it was foretold years earlier. Jesus rode a young donkey, fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, "*Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, daughter of Jerusalem! Look! Your King is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious. He is humble and is riding on a donkey, yes, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*" The King of Zion (Jerusalem), the messianic King from David's line, entered Jerusalem amid praise and glory.

People often describe themselves as optimists or pessimists. The optimist sees a glass half full, the pessimist half empty. Either way, the goal is to have a full glass, right? An empty glass is just something to look at, while a full glass means you have an entire beverage still awaiting you. A full glass gives you hope and anticipation; an empty glass means the happiness has departed.

We Christians are often mocked for what we celebrate in this week ahead. First, many will say that Jesus' Passion, riding into Jerusalem on this Palm Sunday only to be killed on Friday, demonstrates that we Christians love wallowing in pessimism, that celebrating Jesus emptied of all dignity, even of life itself, expresses some kind of deep-seated need to beat ourselves up, always to look on the dark side. They'd say we Christians must feel too guilt-ridden ever to allow ourselves a full glass of life.

Then, by the climax of Holy Week, Easter morning, we'll be mocked for foolish optimism - for believing a myth that some ancient figurehead of ours, Jesus Christ, actually rose from the dead. Get a life, we're told. Deal with the realities of this world as they are. Address the problems going on around us rather than wasting our time dreaming of some pie in the sky. Foolish, glass-half-full, whistling-in-the-dark optimism.

A blessed Holy Week to you! - a week when it's not about glass half full or glass half empty; it's about Jesus emptying Himself in order to make us full.

